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FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 2008

In Today's Papers

Black Sea Tensions Rising

All news outlets today pay particular attention to anxieties that the U.S., NATO, and Russia are stepping up their game in the war of words and symbols. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes in, "Unrest in the Black Sea," that "some experts claim the U.S. aid shipments into the Black Sea not only contain humanitarian aid, but weapons for the Georgians." In addition, the paper notes, "Two NATO ships passed through the straits yesterday" which Yeni Safak says, "begins the effects on Turkey from the war between Georgia and Russia in the Caucasus." But mainstream Hurriyet reports NATO issued a statement indicating the two ships "were being used for routine joint exercises in the Black Sea within the NATO Task Force Operations." Mainstream Milliyet reports, "It is not clear if the U.S. ships carrying humanitarian aid to Georgia will participate in the NATO exercises. (Note: A NATO mission did pass through the straights yesterday on a routine mission to Bulgaria and Romania. It is not part of the Georgian aid mission.) Mainstream Aksam's front page headline reads, "Turkey is caught in the Middle between the U.S. and Russia's in the New Cold War." Aksam's article comments, "Tensions are rising after the war between Russia and Georgia," as, "U.S. plans to send giant hospital ships were foiled by the Montreux Convention." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet's headline reads, "The U.S. Gets the Chance to Make a Show of Force in the Black Sea," as, "their use of war ships in the Black Sea sends a message to the Russians."

Russia Stirs Up Regional Politics

Media outlets noted Russia's decision to cut ties with NATO, Russia's detention in Gori of the French Ambassador, and Russian efforts to garner support in the region. Cumhuriyet comments on Russia's decision to cut ties with NATO with the headline, "The Missile Shield Severs Relations." Zaman also reports, "Russia Halts Relations with NATO." Mainstream Sabah carries the headline, "Russian Troops Detain the French Ambassador for Three Hours," when he traveled to Gori, "a city outside of the boundaries of South Ossetia but still occupied by Russian troops." Sabah reports, "The French government spat fire in response." Islamist-oriented Zaman notes, "The Russians Send a Detention Message to Russia," as France

called the ambassador's detention "unacceptable."

In a related story, Zaman reports, "Syrian President Assad met with Russian President Medvedev," and Syria, "pledged support for Russia's response to Georgian provocation and for the establishment of a naval base," so that "Syria and Russia could work together in order to form a strategic partnership that seeks stability in the region." Zaman notes, "Russia responded to the U.S. missile defense agreement in Poland by setting up the same arrangement with Belarus and by extending Russian dialogue in order to strengthen ties to the Middle East." Liberal Radikal reports, "Eyes are on the Kremlin," as "Abkhazia and South Ossetia officially request from Russia its recognition of their independence." CNN Turk reports, "Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan will speak with Russian FM Lavrov regarding the implementation of the Caucasus Platform," and liberal Radikal notes, "Turkey and Russia will work together in order to include Armenia in the platform."

Editorial Commentary on Regional Diplomatic Developments

Yasin Dogan wrote in Yeni Safak: "Turkish diplomacy is very busy due to Turkey's multi-lateral efforts. It is important to evaluate the US reaction to the Caucasus Platform. Yet at the same time, Turkey cannot ignore its relations with Russia. Turkey cannot afford to be aloof to its neighbors in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Turkish foreign policy should be active and crafted with a multi-lateral vision. It is important to maintain balance, which is good for Turkey's national interest."

Orhan Birgit in Cumhuriyet: "US Representative Mark Kirk's statement

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that Turkey is like a 'satellite' of Russia is nonsense and rude. Kirk must explain the reason why he supports the efforts of the French president but opposes Turkey's initiatives in the Caucasus. Turkey's friends and allies should be happy that Turkey is pursuing a policy which shows the Montreux Treaty is vital not only for the region but for world peace as well. It's good that the US dropped the idea of sending giant hospital ships to Georgia, and instead will send vessels from the American fleet in the Aegean, which meet the regulations stated in the Montreux Treaty. The US should thank Turkey for providing reasonable guidance."

Mumtazer Turkone in Zaman: "Today, the US needs Russia as an enemy. Russia is more than eager to play such a role, since polarization with the US would allow Moscow the opportunity to return to its old behavior during Russia's imperial days. The missile shield system deployed in Poland does not actually protect the US from Russian missiles, but renders the American state more powerful against other opponents around the world. Thus, world politics are returning to the old days of the Cold War. Within this framework, Turkey is an energy route and the battlefield of micro-nationalisms."

Rice Negotiating Agreement with Iraq

Mainstream Sabah reports, "after signing a missile defense shield agreement with Poland, Rice made a surprise visit to Iraq," where, "a timetable for withdrawal is set for June 2009." Leftist Taraf carries the headline, "Rice Pursues a Signature with Iraq," and notes, "Iraq Foreign Minister Zebari emphasized the need to include a date for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq." Liberal Radikal reports, "Rice Bargains with Baghdad on the Status of Forces Agreement."

Editorial Commentary on Turkey/Sudan, Turkish Democracy Debates

Mehmet Yilmaz wrote in Hurriyet: "At his press conference, the President of Sudan not only made comments about the genocide case but also described Turkey as his accomplice. Interestingly enough, the Turkish MFA did not make any statement to contradict al-Bashir's view of Turkey as his crime partner. Apparently the AKP government has no objection to this attitude, which will have a very negative impact on Turkey's candidacy for the UNSC. While the government has a modern vision for membership to the UN Security Council, the government's Islamic roots undermine such a target."

Ismet Berkan wrote in Radikal: "As soon as the parliament convenes,

the ruling AKP will exert most of its energy on local elections. Most of them believe that a vast majority of votes in local elections will indicate an acquittal for the AKP vis-à-vis the people [in the aftermath of the Constitutional Court decision]. However this is not going to be good enough for Turkish democracy since we still do not have a modern democracy. A legitimate checks and balances system is all we need. Unless we have that we will end up in a new political crisis. This is the very time to repair our democratic system."

Explosion from Car Bomb Wounds 16 in Izmir

All news outlets report that early Thursday in the Aegean port city of Izmir, five policemen, three soldiers, including a colonel, and five civilians were wounded when a bomb-laden parked car exploded as a minivan carrying police officers passed by. Izmir Governor Cahit Kirac told reporters the bomb was detonated by remote control. The car was reportedly stolen in Istanbul a year ago. Liberal Radikal claims the PKK to be behind the attack, which, according to the paper, was an "al-Qaeda type" act. Radikal says yesterday's incident in Izmir was similar to a PKK bomb attack in Diyarbakir in October, which claimed six lives. Police are seeking two other cars that might be used in attacks in major cities. Papers recall eight bomb attacks were carried out around the country over the last eight months.

Editorial Commentary on the Recent PKK Attacks

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Guneri Civaoglu writes in mainstream Milliyet: "The PKK has now shifted its actions to major cities, of which the bombings in Mersin and Izmir are the latest examples. The car bomb attacks in these cities indicate the PKK is cornered on both sides of the Iraqi border. The upcoming municipal elections could be another reason behind the latest attacks. The pro-Kurdish DTP is uncomfortable with the increasing popularity of the ruling AKP in southeast Turkey. The PKK hopes the attacks in Turkish cities will stoke polarization, which will help increase the support for the DTP."

Turkey's NSC Discusses the Caucasus, Cyprus, Iran

All papers carry a statement issued after the National Security Council which notes the council discussed the fight against PKK and developments in the Caucasus, Cyprus and Iraq. "The NSC expressed determination on the fight against terrorism and discussed measures to ensure peace and stability in the Caucasus. Regarding Cyprus, the NSC members expressed solidarity with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and also discussed the fundamentals for a comprehensive solution in light of upcoming Cyprus talks on September 3. On Iraq, the NSC discussed ongoing projects to realize a high level cooperation scheme between Turkey and Iraq as well as emphasized the importance of more bilateral contacts with Iraq" the statement detailed. Radikal mentioned that NSC statement went beyond usual practices for the first time by adding a non-political line that included good wishes to General Buyukanit upon his retirement.

Turkey Blocks Access to 853 Websites

Mainstream Milliyet reports on its front page that access to YouTube has been restricted in Turkey for over three months. In addition, the paper notes that as of August 18, Turkey's Telecommunication Department has restricted access to 853 websites. Turkey has now joined the list of countries enforcing tight Internet restrictions such as China, Iran, Armenia, Tunisia, Indonesia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, says Milliyet.

TV News:

CNN Turk

Domestic News

- A court in Malatya accepted the prosecutor's demand to include the 'Ergenekon' indictment in the case concerning the murder of three Christian Bible publishers in 2007.

- The second round of collective bargaining talks between the government and civil servants' unions ended Thursday without an

agreement.

- A survey by Turkey's Central Bank shows the year-end inflation to stand at 11.04 percent.

International News

- UN High Commissioner for Refugees says 118,000 people have fled their homes because of the conflict between Georgia and Russia.

- Secretary Rice and Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said the two countries have agreed on setting timetables for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.

- Afghan officials said at least 10 civilians have been killed in an air attack by the US-led forces in Afghanistan's Laghman province.

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